

**Modern History Sourcebook:
Captain Spencer:
The Perils of Travel Through Moldavia, 1854**

From: <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/1854moldavia.html>

On leaving Jassy, the frost having set in with increased severity, we rolled onward with great rapidity, as if our postilion was running a race against time; and although the horses were small, they went at the rate of fifteen *wersts* an hour. While we remained within a few miles of the town, cultivated fields, villages and hamlets, neat gardens and vineyards, alternately met the view; but these pleasing objects once past, there was the same want of population we before observed, and the country increased in solitary wildness when we entered the mountain district. At one time our route lay through a dense forest, then along the banks of a charming lake; now we wound round a steep precipice, then plunged into a dark and dismal abyss, to emerge into a beautiful valley, watered with the meandering stream or rushing torrent, given by the bountiful hand of nature to fertilize the soil.

What might not be done here, if this highly favoured country were occupied by a colony of our scientific husbandmen from Western Europe! Every one of these sunny slopes would then be laid out in vineyards; the valley in cornfields, pastures and meadows; and the hills and mountains stripped of their impenetrable forests, to make way for numerous herds of cattle and flocks of sheep. Still, the desolate aspect of the country does not prevent many a Boyar from adding considerable to his revenue by the sale of leeches, which are found in some of the rivers and marshes of this mountain district.

Hitherto our journey had been most prosperous, >till arriving at the vast forest that separates Moldavia from the Bukowina, we were overtaken by one of those sudden snow storms so fatal to the traveller in this wild inhospitable district. Happily our postilion, prognosticating from the lowering aspect of the heavens to the danger that threatened us, galloped madly toward a ruined chalet, the usual resting-place of such caravans as journey in this direction. On arriving at our place of refuge, we found it to be a miserable wooden hut, surrounded by a dilapidated paling, filled with travellers, their packs, horses, and a flock of sheep, and as continuing our route to Boyana, the next post station, was completely out of the question, we made preparations to pass the night. Our poor horses being badly off for shelter, our first care was to repair the shed with a quantity of loose timber, in which operation we were aided by the snow when making a roof, for it froze as fast as it fell.

With respect to provender for man and beast, we had taken good care to provide an ample supply in case of an accident, and as the other travellers felt inclined to be merry, a fat sheep was selected and roasted for the occasion; we were moreover favoured by a change in the weather, for the night became clear and bright, though it still continued to freeze hard. The reader must now suppose we had supped, and smoked the *chibouque*, but before retiring to rest we took precautions, lest any stray wolf should pay us a visit during

the night---and to guard against this mishap, it was determined that our whole party should in turn mount guard, and replenish the blazing fire we had made in the centre of the enclosure, intended for the twofold purpose of keeping our cattle warm, and scaring away any dangerous intruder.

Things went on very well 'till about the middle of the night, when we were awoke from the land of dreams by the discharge of firearms, and, lo! our young *pandour* rushed into the hut, exclaiming he had fired at a wolf and wounded him, and that the animal fled howling back to the forest. "Rash, foolish boy!" cried our of our fellow travellers, jumping up from his lair of sheepskins, "we shall have the whole hungry pack down upon us in less than half an hour, for they will devour him, and then track his blood to the place where he was wounded." Unfortunately for our slumbers the old man was right, and now we had to make preparations as quickly as possible for the encounter.

We have already said that our night quarters was a miserable hut, a few feet from the ground; consequently our first object was to barricade it with pieces of wood, so as to render it, in case of need, sufficiently strong to resist any attack that might be made upon it by the wolves; but our poor horses and the flock of sheep in the open shed were exposed to certain destruction, and our next care was to take measures in their defense. On inspecting our fortress, we found several breaches had been made in the paling of the enclosure; these we filled up with piles of wood, and then placed our little garrison as sentinels at different points, to beat back our enemies should they attempt to climb over the enclosure. Our party consisted of seven: a butcher and his help, the owner of the flock of sheep, from Tchernowitz; two caravan rivers with their packs of wool, on their way to Jassy; the postilion, the pandour, and ourselves. As to weapons of defense, our fellow-travellers had none other than the long knife and light hatchet they carried in their belt; this we remedied by converting pieces of wood into ponderous clubs. As for the pandour and ourselves, we were armed to the teeth, with plenty of ammunition at hand if necessary.

Half an hour or more had probably elapsed, when we first perceived the enemy, in greater force than we considered agreeable, stealthily marching around the glare of the immense fire we kept blazing in the centre of the enclosure, as if debating whether it would be prudent to cross the gleaming boundary. At length a powerful fellow made his appearance, probably the commander-in-chief, who, after reconnoitering our position, being no doubt strongly tempted by bleating sheep and neighing horses---the unerring instinct of the poor animals telling them that danger was near---dashed boldly forward, followed by the whole pack, and with a bound attempted to clear the paling. Stout hearts and strong clubs, however, soon drove them back, laying many sprawling on the ground; we reserved our fire, in obedience to the advice of our captain, the old shepherd, who recommended us not to use our firearms unless an opportunity should be afforded of inflicting certain death, in order that none might escape again to the forest, and bring back a reinforcement.

Our ferocious assailants, not liking the blows from our clubs, retreated, and apparently, after holding a consultation, it was resolved to attack the enclosure in different directions,

and in some places where it was weak two or three succeeded in climbing over the fence, when they were instantly dispatched by our firearms and the long knives and hatchets of our fellow combatants, when we hurled them over the fence to be devoured by their famishing comrades beneath. The fate of our first invaders, however, did not deter others from following their example, and in the morning we counted the skeletons of eight or nine who had become the victims of their temerity. Happily the dawn of day caused our unwelcome visitors to return to their woods, leaving us at liberty to pursue our journey, and with mutual congratulations for our providential escape our party separated. The day was fine, the snow as hard as a bed of ice, and after a drive of a couple of hours we came to the long-wished-for *Boyana*.

Source:

From: Captain Spencer, *Turkey, Russia, The Black Sea*, (London: George Routledge and Co., 1854), pp. 138-143, reprinted in Alfred J. Bannan & Achilles Edelenyi, eds., *Documentary History of Eastern Europe*, (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1970), pp. 149-153.

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